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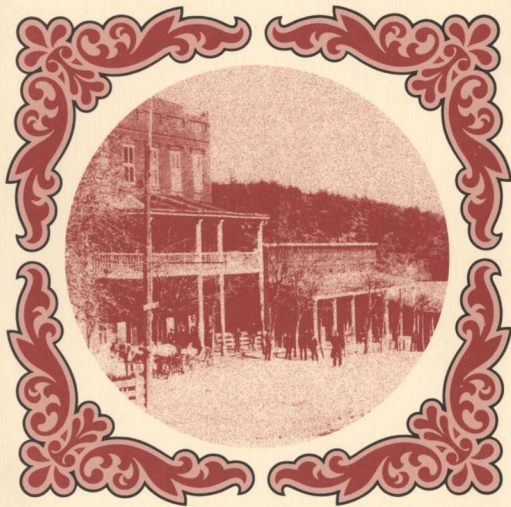
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# SHASTA



## State Historic Park



## Brief History and Tour Guide



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### Brief History and Tour Guide



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*July 1985*

# Shasta City

## *Historic Gateway to the Rich Gold Diggings of Shasta, Siskiyou, and Trinity Counties*

### *"Queen City" of the Northern Mines*

**S**ix miles west of Redding on Highway 299 a row of old, half-ruined, brick buildings remind passing motorists that Shasta City, the lusty "Queen City" of California's northern mining district, once stood on this site. Iron shutters still swing on massive, old, iron hinges before the doors and windows of grass-filled, roofless buildings that once were crowded with merchandise, and alive with the human sounds of business, trade, and social endeavor. Across the road is another old brick building that has now been restored to its 1861 appearance, the year when it was converted from commercial uses to become the Shasta County Courthouse. Today the building is filled with historical exhibits, and a collection of historic paintings and other artifacts that make it the central figure of Shasta State Historic Park. The ghostly unrestored, brick ruins across the highway are part of the park, too, as are some twenty acres of land and an old Trinity River hay barn. These buildings and some of the nearby roads, cottages, and cemeteries are all silent but eloquent vestiges of the intense activity that was centered here during the California gold rush.

### *Origin of the Town*

**T**he fine, year-round springs that flow out of the steep hillside above the site of Shasta City have been known and used by human beings from time immemorial. They quickly became known, however, as Reading Springs or Upper Reading's Springs after Pierson B. Reading discovered gold in the area during the summer of 1848.

Reading had come to California in 1843 and spent some time working for John Sutter at New Helvetia. In 1844 he obtained a 26,663-acre land grant from Governor Manuel Micheltorena and the Mexican government. In 1847, after serving in Fremont's California Battalion he attempted to settle permanently on his three-mile-wide, eighteen-mile-long rancho beside the Sacramento River in the vicinity of the present-day city of Redding. In 1848 Reading visited the James Marshall gold discovery site at Coloma and quickly concluded that the mountains near his rancho were probably equally rich in gold deposits. Immediately he hurried back to his rancho and set out on a prospecting expedition that took him up Cottonwood Creek and over to the Trinity River where he soon struck it rich. With a crew of some 65 Indians and three white men, Reading worked his gold claim for about six weeks before trouble with a large number of well-armed, extremely aggressive immigrants from Oregon induced him to abandon mining and return to this rancho. Word of Reading's gold discovery soon reached north into Oregon and south into central California, and before long a rush to "the northern mines" had begun.



Reading Springs became a favored campsite for the eager gold seekers of 1849 because of its fine supply of both wood and pure water. By September of 1849, between 500 and 600 people were living in tents and other temporary shelters close by the springs. The winter of '49 was unusually cold and wet, and resulted in serious health and food supply problems for the miners, but as good weather returned in the spring of 1850, the town once again began to grow rapidly. The town's first permanent structure, a log cabin, was erected late in 1849 on High Street. During the spring of 1850 a whip-saw mill went into operation nearby, and wood frame buildings began to be built along Main Street as fast as sawn lumber could be made available. The St. Charles and Trinity House Hotels were the first of these structures, but within two years Main Street was solidly lined by wood-frame, one- and two-story buildings.

## The Boom Years

During the gold rush excitement of 1850 thousands of eager Argonauts poured into the northern mining district, and towns sprang up in every canyon, wash, and river basin from Cottonwood Creek to the Oregon border. The towns of Weaverville and Shasta Butte City (Yreka) were founded along with many smaller ones – Muletown, One-Horse-Town, French Gulch, Jackass Flat, Whiskey Creek, Clear Creek, Piety Hill, Bald Hills, Gas Point, etc. – but Reading Springs continued to be a focal point for the whole region. In recognition of the town's growing importance a group of miners gathered together on June 8, 1850 to find a new and better name for the town. One poetically inclined young man suggested "Fountania" (a reference to the springs), but others greeted that proposal with guffaws and promised, if that name were chosen, to call it "Damn Nonsense". A happy compromise was reached when the group decided to name the town "Shasta City". A few months later the town was chosen to be the county seat of newly formed Shasta County. Still growing rapidly, and more prosperous than ever, Shasta was soon being referred to as the "Queen City of the North".



Main Street before the fire. Drawn in 1852 by George King (King's Book Store). Shows the pre-Wells Fargo banking and express office of Adams & Company and the St. Charles Hotel in the center of town.



The primary reason for the town's runaway prosperity was that throughout most of the 1850s when the gold rush was at its height, all of the roads from San Francisco, Sacramento, and other southerly points terminated at Shasta City. Beyond this point only rough and poorly marked trails led west or north to camps and gold diggings on the Trinity, Salmon, Scott, and Upper Sacramento Rivers – and on north into Oregon. Merchandise had to be unloaded, warehoused, and eventually transported into the mountains on heavily loaded strings of mules – “pack trains” – that consisted of a few or as many as 200 animals.

At times business in Shasta was so lively that Main Street became difficult, even dangerous to cross. Piles of freight snarled both foot and wagon traffic. Stagecoaches and wagons drawn by teams of horses, mules, or oxen were continually arriving in town to deliver freight, mail, and passengers, while at the same time, muleskinners brought their “pack trains” in to load up the many tons of food and other merchandise that had to be carried back up into the mountains. All this transportation-related activity made Shasta seem very much like a port city, and in fact, a correspondent for the Shasta Courier once described the town as standing “at the head of ‘whoa’ navigation”.

As long as miners were making wages (or better), and as long as more of them kept pouring into the northern district, Shasta kept on growing. During October 1852 shipments of gold out of Shasta County averaged one hundred thousand dollars per week. Total for the year was nearly \$2.5 million. On December 1, 1852, however, fire destroyed about one-third of the buildings in Shasta. This was generally looked upon as only a temporary setback, and the town was quickly rebuilt. A few months later, on June 14, 1853, at four o'clock in the afternoon, another even more disastrous fire broke out and in just 33 minutes destroyed the entire commercial center of town. Damage was estimated at half a million dollars. But despite even this very serious setback, residents once again set about rebuilding the town. This time, however, they required all commercial buildings on Main Street to be built in such a way as to make them fireproof. As a result, within two years, twenty-eight new, brick-walled, iron-shuttered buildings replaced the burned out wooden structures along Main Street, and the street itself was widened to 100 feet and graded to better accommodate heavy traffic.

Losses from the fire were soon made up and by 1855, when Shasta was at peak prosperity, there were five hotels in town as well as five stage companies, one horse market and livery stable, one blacksmith shop, two drugstores (wholesale and retail), three doctors, four attorneys, one public bathhouse, three book stores, seven general merchandise stores (wholesale and retail), three furniture builders, and a number of other establishments including restaurants, clothing stores, a jeweler, a bowling alley, and various saloons where drinking, gambling, and other forms of entertainment were available. Available supplies included all the necessities of life and many luxuries. Oysters, fresh game, and other fine food as well as excellent wine were served in the better restaurants. Fine fabrics and stylish clothing could be purchased in any one of several stores on Main Street. Anton Roman's Shasta Book Store handled the works of Shakespeare, Byron, Milton, and other classics as well as the latest dime novels. (Roman later moved his business to San Francisco where he hired an obscure young journalist by the name of Bret Harte to write stories and edit a new magazine called “The Overland Monthly”. The first story Harte did for the magazine, “The Luck of Roaring Camp”, was an instant sensation and brought overnight fame to both Harte and The Overland Monthly.)



Shasta in 1856. From a lithograph published by the town's leading book dealer, Anton Roman. Reproduced through the courtesy of the Bancroft Library.

## A Cosmopolitan Society

The gold rush brought people to California from the far corners of the earth, and as a result, the early day population of Shasta City was extremely diverse. Many languages were spoken, and there were representatives of many races, as well as nations, of the world. For a time these people got on well together because there was gold enough for everyone, and likely-looking claims were available for the taking. At first, even the native Indians were often willing to join in the search for gold, though in most cases they soon found it impossible to get along with the ever-increasing numbers of gold seekers. Fishing and hunting grounds were continually being taken over or destroyed, and other even more serious problems soon brought about an extremely brutal, spasmodic kind of warfare. Peace treaties were made by men of good will on both sides, and broken by others who were too ignorant, impatient, or bloodthirsty to abide by any kind of peaceful settlement. Inevitably, especially as they were increasingly outnumbered, the Wintu and other Shasta area Indians suffered one disastrous setback after another, until finally in about 1866 they were forced to give up all semblance of resistance and independence, and accept second-class citizenship within the new social order.



In the years after 1849 the rush for gold became increasingly competitive and businesslike, and as it did the "everybody-for-himself" atmosphere gave way to more highly organized, well capitalized mining ventures. Social organizations flourished, churches and schools were established, and soon it was possible to use social and political alignments for economic advantage. In 1852, for instance, the large Chinese population of California was forced to pay a "foreign" miner's tax, and otherwise accept a subservient social and economic position. "John Chinaman" was forced to move out of some mining districts, to work for other owners, or resort to "teaspoon mining" – the painstaking process of cleaning up the "tailings" left behind by earlier and less thorough mining operations.

In Shasta City itself a Chinese quarter grew up in the southeastern part of town – "Hong Kong" – where several hundred Chinese people lived the year around and operated hotels, stores, gambling houses, and other businesses. For many years Shasta had its own Joss House or temple similar to the one that still stands today at Weaverville Joss House State Historic Park some 40 miles west of Shasta.

## The Decline of Shasta City

In 1857, a wagon road was pushed across Buckhorn Pass to Weaverville, and Shasta began to lose its unique, commercially advantageous position at the head of "whoa navigation". In subsequent years as the road system was further expanded, Shasta continued little by little to lose its dominant position.



Then, in June 1868 the main California-Oregon stage route was shifted to a new road that followed the Sacramento River Canyon and entirely bypassed Shasta. The same trend was continued in 1871 when it became apparent that the Central Pacific Railroad would not be brought into Shasta, but would instead terminate at a point some six miles to the east at a place known as Poverty Flat, close beside the Sacramento River. Shasta residents called the new terminus a "hot, malarious, stink-hole", but railroad officials could not be persuaded to change their plans. During 1872 Poverty Flat was surveyed, subdivided, and turned into a boom town as businessmen abandoned Shasta and other established towns in order to be near the railroad. In July the new town was renamed in honor of a Central Pacific Railroad executive, B.B. Redding, and as the trains began to roll the town soon outstripped Shasta City as the center of activity for Shasta County. Nevertheless, even after a disastrous fire in 1878, Shasta City managed to remain the seat of county government until 1888 when Redding was at last designated the county seat after a long, bitter political fight.

## Preservation and Restoration

The movement to save and restore the crumbling remains of Shasta City began in 1922 when the Native Sons of the Golden West, McCloud Parlor 149, bought the courthouse ruins and began to call for recognition of the site as an historic monument. This preservation movement had earlier suffered severe setbacks when the Charter Oak, and later the Empire Hotels were torn down (1915 and 1923, respectively) to supply raw material for buildings in the city of Redding. Nevertheless, in 1926, Roscoe J. Anderson, then a State Assemblyman from Redding, began a campaign to make the "ghost" town into a state park and historic monument. Thereafter, the Shasta Historical Society together with Mae Helene Bacon Boggs and many others worked diligently to preserve what remained of the historic community. In 1937, the California State Park and Recreation Commission began to acquire property for the historic park, although restoration work was delayed until after the conclusion of World War II. Finally, in June 1950, the courthouse museum was opened to the public, and Shasta State Historic Park was officially and ceremonially dedicated to the pleasure, inspiration, and historical education of the people. The museum also houses the Boggs collection of historical artifacts, books, and paintings – one of the state's finest collections of California landscape oils and watercolors.

A visitor center complete with interpretive displays and other information about old Shasta has recently been developed by the "Town of Shasta Interpretive Association." The new center in a completely refurbished old building is directly across Trinity Alley from the Empire Hotel site.



†  
Union Cemetery

To Eureka 140 mi.

Brewer  
Ruins

VISITOR  
CENTER

DISTRICT  
HEADQUARTERS

Restroom

MAIN

STREET

SCALE IN FEET

State Park Property

### Existing Buildings

### Building Sites

## Building Ruins

① Courthouse

② *Empire Hotel*

③ Charter Oak Hotel

#### 4 The Callaghan Block

⑤ *Brick Row*

⑥ *Grotefend Alley and Cottage*

⑦ Bull, Baker and Company

Tomlinson and Wood

9 Peter Hoff's Butcher Shop

⑩ *Litsch Store*

⑪ Bakery

12 Schoolhouse

⑬ *Masonic Hall*

⑭ Pioneer Barn

12





*While in Shasta, you may want to tour what remains of the town. By following the numbered map in the center of this booklet and reading the descriptions for each stop, you might get an idea of what this town was like in its heyday.*



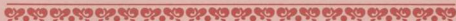
## ① Courthouse

Shasta County's second courthouse was originally a business establishment. It was built by James Loag in October of 1855 at a cost of \$16,000. Sixty-five feet across the front and 70 feet deep, this "fireproof" building was divided into three stores, each with a basement. "Loag's Block" housed several enterprises, some of which were the Metropolitan Billiard Saloon and Restaurant, the Eagle Hat Store, G.C. Schroder's Saddlery, and the Beehive Saloon. For almost six years the building served its tenants well.

In August 1861 the county purchased the property. Its occupants moved out and bids to alter the interior walls and build a jail in the basement were accepted. The job cost \$25,000, and the county moved into its new courthouse in December 1861. For 27 years this was the center of activity in Shasta County. Then in 1888, after a long and bitter political battle, the county seat was moved to Redding.

The jail was kept in use for over a year while the new one was being built in Redding and then used for awhile as a lock-up for local incorrigibles. After that the building sat vacant until the community started using it for its affairs.

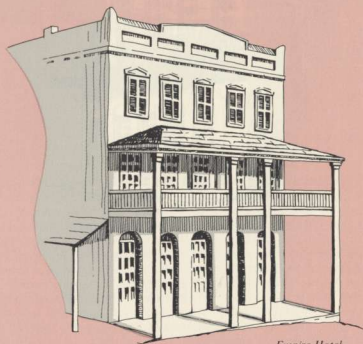
In 1892 the Shasta Literary Society rented the old courthouse for five years. They made repairs, built a stage, and put in seating. 1892 and 1893 were active years filled with dramas, musical affairs, festive celebrations, and grand balls. In the years that followed, the activities dwindled until the building was finally abandoned and fell into ruin. By 1922 only a shell remained. The State acquired property in 1937 and began restoration in 1948. The Courthouse Museum was opened to the public in June of 1950.



## ② Empire Hotel

The first Empire Hotel was one of the frame buildings destroyed by the fire in June of 1853. A new "fireproof" building was not completed until April 1857. The imposing three-story brick structure cost \$30,000 and was destined to become the leading hotel north of Sacramento for the next 20 years. The new proprietors proclaimed it as a "first class house", describing the rooms as "plastered, large and airy and well furnished". They boasted a dining hall that could accommodate any number of guests in the highest fashion and a bar featuring the best wines and liquors from San Francisco. It had a shaving saloon "fitted up in the best style" and a livery stable and corral to match any known to man or beast. What did all this luxury cost? Board and lodging was \$2.50 per day or \$16.00 for a week; single meals were \$.75.

Among the Empire's noted guests were Governors Stanford, Haight, and Bigler. Other luminaries included John Bidwell and Joaquin Miller. Like many other businesses in Shasta, the Empire Hotel changed ownership many times. In June of 1858 J.H. Robins purchased one-half of the hotel and leased the other half. Three years later Rhodehamel and Craddock bought all the furniture and fixtures and leased the building. The Empire's last owner, James J. Hill, acquired the property sometime in the 1890s. He kept possession until 1923 when he had it dismantled and used the bricks to build his new building in Redding.



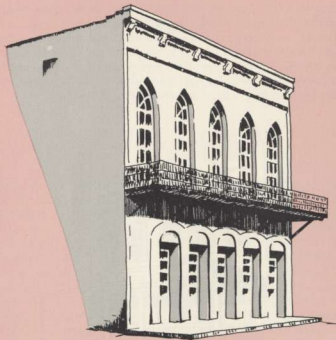
Empire Hotel





### ③ Charter Oak Hotel

Constructed about the same time as the Empire Hotel, the Charter Oak Hotel was built of yellow bricks. Although this three-story building, with its Gothic windows and graceful wrought iron balcony, was surely the most beautiful building in Shasta, it was never as distinguished as the Empire. Its ground floor was a two-story ballroom. The back halves of the second and third floors were apartments. The ballroom was the scene of many grand affairs during Shasta's golden years. In 1915 the Charter Oak was dismantled and the yellow bricks hauled into Redding to build a new steam laundry there.



*Charter Oak Hotel*

### ④ The Callaghan Block

Completed during the summer of 1855, Callaghan's Block was one of the most impressive of the new fireproof buildings. A large building, 61 feet by 70 feet, it was divided into four businesses. Besides the Callaghan Brothers' own grocery, Roethe's Drugstore, Wiener and Company's Dry Goods, and Roman's Books were the first tenants. Later occupants were the Alta Express Company, J.W. Downer – Toys, Candy, and Fruit, and the Smile Saloon.



*Section of the Callaghan Block*

### ⑤ Brick Row

During Shasta's early days (1850-1852), Main Street was lined with rough lumber and canvas structures. People were just too busy to bother with durability. But by the end of 1855, the town had taken on a look of permanence. Twenty-eight brick buildings faced Main Street and Shasta boasted "the longest row of brick buildings in the North".

The big fire of December, 1852 slowed business down only until new shelters could be put up. Still another major fire occurred in 1853, but the ashes had hardly cooled before new and more permanent buildings were under construction. Four "fireproof" brick buildings were completed that year, the first belonging to Jacobson and Company, Dry Goods and Clothiers. A plaque on the northeast corner of this old building commemorates Noble's Trail – an important improvement on the older, more circuitous Lassen Trail over the Sierra Nevada from Susanville.

The following year many owners tore down their frame buildings and replaced them with brick. Iron shutters were added as a further protection against fire. Occupants of Brick Row during the 1850s included: Spatz and Litsch, a high class saloon, John Klotz, the Washington Meat Market; and J.W. Downer's hardware store. Benjamin Shurtleff's building housed his own drugstore and the Goldstone Brothers general merchandise store, Hollub and Isaaci Dry Goods and Clothing, and Levy and Company's Tobacco Shop. W.S. Wills furnished his own one-story building in 1854 and then added a second floor the next year.

Brick Row witnessed many changes during the 1860s and in 1872 merchants began moving to the new town of Redding. By the time the county seat moved to Redding in 1888, Brick Row was almost completely abandoned.

## ⑥ Grotefend Alley and Cottage

Although just a drain today, this used to be a stairway up the hillside to the once proud home of Gus Grotefend. Gus struck it rich in the gold fields and purchased a fine hotel in town, the St. Charles, which turned out to be better than a gold mine. He also bought the lot behind the hotel and built his home and this beautiful stairway. "Grotefend's Cottage" was a two-story house with the back door opening on High Street. Using Grotefend's Alley, it was only a short distance to his place of business.



Grotefend Cottage

## ⑦ Bull, Baker and Company

Bull, Baker and Company's general merchandise store was the most expensive of the new fireproof buildings. It was completed in the fall of 1853 at a cost of \$15 000. Their business was known as a "Forwarding Commission Company". This type of operation required one partner, George Baker, in San Francisco to purchase their goods and ship them up the Sacramento River to Red Bluff. Here the second partner, Elphius Bull, would transfer the goods to freight wagons going to Shasta. At Shasta, Ebenizer Robbins, the third partner, handled the sales. The merchandise was sold retail to local patrons or wholesale to pack trains going to the outlying mining camps.

## ⑧ Tomlinson and Wood

After their Miners and Packers Supply Store was lost in the fire of June 1853, Tomlinson and Wood were not the first or the most expensive, but they were the fastest. They won \$600 in bets for completing their new two-story brick building, stocking the shelves, and opening for business in just 13 days. Over the years this building housed many enterprises. The Express Saloon moved in in 1857, and in 1860 Wells Fargo and Company hung out its sign. Next came Leventhal's Ladies and Gents Furnishings on the first floor, while the Shasta Courier newspaper occupied the upstairs.

## ⑨ Peter Hoff's Butcher Shop

Peter Hoff's Butcher Shop stood on this site. It was a wood-frame building built in 1855. The establishment, known for awhile as the City Meat Market, was destroyed by fire in 1878. The cavity in the hillside was the cold storage room. Each year, after the first frost, the 10-foot by 14-foot dugout was used as a smokehouse for a month or so.

## ⑩ Litsch Store

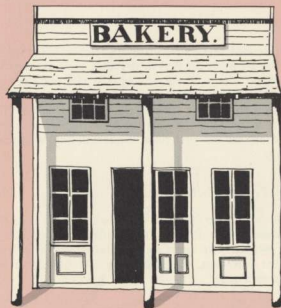
Today's Litsch Store was originally two separate buildings with a common wall. The first one (to your right) was Henry Leo's Furnishing and Dry Goods, completed in 1855. It was 19 feet across the front and 50 feet deep, erected at a cost of \$4,000. The following year Fuller and Cushing paid Leo \$150 for the use of his wall and put up their grocery store. Cushing bought out Fuller in January of 1857, and the store became Cushing and Brothers. That same year the Post Office moved into the store.

Ownership changed four more times until 1873 when Frank Litsch purchased it for \$400 and opened his family grocery in November of that year. Two years later he paid \$250 for the Leo side of the building. In December 1878 Litsch added clothing, shoes and boots, hats, miners' supplies, and other wares of all descriptions to his line of merchandise. Frank operated the store until 1895 when he sold it and the entire stock to other members of his family for \$4,500. In all, the Litsch family owned and operated the store for almost 90 years.

## 11 Bakery

The frame building that stood on this corner was Shasta's bakery for most of its history. The building was destroyed by fire several times but was quickly rebuilt. Charles Boell operated the bakery in 1859, Boell and Henry Blumb in 1874, and from 1878 Blumb was alone. The pile of bricks is the remains of the oven.

On this site the "Town of Shasta Interpretive Association" plans to reconstruct a replica of the old "U.S. Bakery" as it appeared during the 1870s.



## 12 Schoolhouse

In 1873 the two brick buildings on this lot were remodeled into a four-room schoolhouse. This was Shasta's third schoolhouse and served for the next 53 years, when it was destroyed by fire in 1925. Using the same bricks from the burned building, they built Shasta's fourth school (the building across the lot in front of you). Sometime about 1957 or '58, they moved into their new facilities, and this building has been used for community affairs since.



*Schoolhouse*

## 13 Masonic Hall

In August of 1854 Julius Norton and Silas Tucker built this three-story building to house their mercantile business. December, the same year, the Masonic Lodge bought the third floor. When Norton and Tucker went bankrupt in 1859, the lodge acquired the rest of the building. They converted the first floor into a banquet hall and have met here regularly since 1854.

## 14 Pioneer Barn

The Pioneer Barn is a historically and esthetically correct example of barns of the mid-1800s. It was originally built on the Foster Ranch, in Trinity County, sometime in the 1850s. When Trinity Dam was completed, the area in the basin about to be flooded had to be cleared by December 1960. Many buildings in the path of the new lake were of historic significance. To preserve a typical structure of the period, the barn on the Foster Ranch was chosen to be moved to Shasta. Although it had been in use for over 100 years it was in very good condition. Its base is 30 feet by 40 feet, and the frame is of hand-hewn timbers. Some are 12 inches by 12 inches and 40 feet long. All the joints are mortised and doweled. The siding is rough board-and-batten. It was disassembled, each piece marked, and reassembled on this site. The dismantling took 170 man days and reassembling 300.





This booklet has been prepared by the California Department of Parks and Recreation in cooperation with the "Town of Shasta Interpretive Association."

*Introductory text by Joseph H. Engbeck Jr.*

*Tour notes by Jeanne Frost and Judge Richard Eaton  
with assistance from other citizens and park staff members.*

*Design, layout and drawings by Ron Warr*

Other publications that may be of special interest:

*Shasta: The Queen City* by Mabel Moores Frisbie and Jean Moores Beauchamp  
*A Bag of Bones* by Marcelle Mason  
*Dear Mad'm* by Stella Patterson  
*Diving and Digging for Gold* by Mary Hill  
*Indian Designs* by David and Jean Villafenor  
*Wintun Indians* by Peter M. Knudtson  
*California Historical Landmarks*  
*State Parks of California* by Joseph H. Engbeck Jr.

These and other publications are available at the Visitor Center, Shasta State Historic Park. A complete list of State Park System publications can be obtained free of charge by writing to the Publications Office, California Department of Parks and Recreation, P.O. Box 2390, Sacramento, CA 95811.

